

WISHA REGIONAL DIRECTIVE

WISHA Services

Department of Labor and Industries

11.55 COMPLIANCE POLICY FOR HANTAVIRUS RELATED CASES

Date: December 30, 1996

I. Background:

Hantavirus pulmonary syndrome (HPS) is a rare but often fatal disease caused by exposure to a newly recognized hantavirus carried primarily by the deer mouse. This disease was first reported in the western states in the spring of 1993 during an outbreak in the Southwest. In Washington State nine cases of HPS have been confirmed. Eight of the nine cases have occurred since 1994. One of the nine cases has been associated with workplace exposure, and all cases have been associated with rural settings. The state mortality rate for HPS is over 50 percent.

Occupational exposure to hantavirus may occur when workers handle deer mice or are exposed to aerosols contaminated with mouse urine, feces, or saliva while working in enclosed spaces or in close proximity with contaminated areas.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) has issued interim recommendations for preventing and controlling exposures to hantavirus. The CDC interim recommendations address precautions for individuals who frequently handle or are exposed to rodents (for example, mammalogists, laboratory workers, or pest control workers). They also provide guidance for workers who enter rodent-infested buildings and/or clean up rodent-contaminated waste materials. At this time, urban workplaces are not expected to pose significant risk since deer mice are normally associated with rural areas or settings.

CDC interim recommendations have *not* been developed for plumbers, electricians, utility workers, maintenance workers, and other occupations that involve entering crawl spaces under buildings that may be rodent infested. Over time, we can expect risk reduction measures to be established for these exposure groups as the result of hazard assessment activities.

II. Scope and Application:

An employer's general obligation to provide a "safe and healthful workplace" under the Washington Industrial Safety and Health Act (WISHA) includes exposure to harmful diseases. Due to the relatively recent recognition of the potential occupational hazards related to hantavirus exposure, the general lack of employer knowledge on this issue, and the absence of a specific standard addressing this hazard, educational activities are L&I's primary emphasis at this time. In concert with these educational efforts, this WISHA Regional Directive (WRD) -- which applies whenever WISHA compliance staff are involved in an inspection related to potential hantavirus exposure -- provides guidance regarding potential compliance activities. This WRD incorporates the substance of WISHA Interim Interpretive Memorandum #96-7-B, which is hereby repealed.

III. Interpretive Guidance:

A. When will WISHA compliance staff issue a hantavirus related citation?

WISHA compliance staff must issue a hantavirus-related citation only if clear evidence of employer knowledge has been documented and feasible abatement methods have been established for the activities evaluated. Feasible abatement methods include those measures specifically identified by CDC or other state or federal guidelines.

B. What alternatives to citation exist?

When potential employee exposure to hantavirus is identified and employer knowledge and/or feasible abatement measures cannot be clearly established, an information message must be issued to inform the employer of the hazard and of measures recommended to reduce the risk for exposure to the hazard. The Compliance Safety and Health Officer (CSHO) must assure that the employer receives a copy of applicable CDC interim recommendations in addition to any other relevant information. The information message may serve to establish employer knowledge if future compliance activity becomes necessary.

C. What standards should be cited for a hantavirus related citation?

1. In cases where employer knowledge and feasible abatement measures have been clearly established, and the CSHO has documented employee exposure to potentially hantavirus-contaminated aerosols or materials,

employers must be cited under the "safe place standards," WAC 296-24-073. Documentation of knowledge and feasible abatement measures must follow procedures provided for safe place citations in the WISHA Compliance Manual, Chapter IV.

2. WAC 296-62-12021, the vermin control standard, will continue to be cited in cases where employers fail to eliminate or prevent vermin infestation in fixed workplaces. This citation must be grouped with safe place citations in those limited cases where safe place is used to address the hazard of exposure to hantavirus.

Frank P. Leuck, Assistant Director
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POLICY & INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT SUBMITTAL FORM
Legislative and Governmental Affairs

Briefly state the subject matter of the Policy or Interpretive Statement:

This WISHA Regional Directive provides guidance related to possible Hantavirus exposure to ensure that existing standards are applied appropriately.

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Signature of Responsible Official (Assistant Director)

Date WRD, Policy or Interpretive Statement Issued: _____

<p>Please submit this form to the Legislative & Governmental Affairs Office at the end of each month, MS: 44001</p>

*If you have any questions please contact
Marie Myerchin-Redifer in the Legislative and Governmental Affairs Office, 902-4205*
